

Preview: Josh Smith Leads The Atlanta Hawks Against The Phoenix Suns

Written by

Friday, 01 March 2013 13:03 -



It was just 48 hours ago the [Phoenix Suns](#) (20-39) were on cloud nine after two big overtime wins on back-to-back nights. Now they host the [Atlanta Hawks](#) (33-23) looking for the trifecta before another long break off.

So far this season the Suns have four total two game winning streaks and even one four game winning streak that they put together after a dismal seven game losing streak. Getting a win here would give them their second longest streak of the season and push them behind four teams in the win column if you are looking further out to the NBA Draft Lottery.

Last season the team had six two-game winning streaks, three three-game, one four-game, and zero streaks of more than four games.

The old days of going on runs with the offense to win five, six, seven, or more game winning streaks seems to be gone with the current roster. Defense can win games and obviously has proven it can win Championships, but the transition from offense to defense struggles to win games in general.

What they are going to have to combat are the Hawks ability to knock down the three and their opportunistic defense.

This year the Hawks are fourth in the league in three-point makes (38.3%) and force 15.2 turnovers per game. They are able to get teams out of their rhythm and finish off the plays with backbreaking threes. Athletically they are great at imposing their will combining for 12.8 blocks and steals as a team.

Both of those have to a major concern for a Suns team that has turned the ball over 172 times

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over the past 10 games (17.2 per game) and on the season they are shooting 32.5% from three. That is good for second to last in the NBA in terms of shooting the three and one of the worst turnover rates in the league as well. The Suns deficiencies play into the Hawks strengths, but there is no doubt the team is playing better as of late and has a punchers chance tonight.

(Recent) History Lesson

These two teams lock up for the first time this season, both featuring a total of five new starters collectively meaning that the last few seasons games do not hold a lot of merit.

Head-to-Head (past four seasons including Playoffs)

Suns: 102.6 PPG (6 wins)

Hawks: 98.1 PPG (2 wins)

Over the course of the last four seasons the Suns have won the lions share of the games, but all the games finished within a 10 point spread and were close affairs. Of course these are not the Suns and Hawks of the last four years. There is no [Steve Nash](#) and no [Joe Johnson](#) . This season the Hawks are averaging a little over 96 points per game and the Suns a little over 94, so a close game in the mid-to-late 90's is realistic.

Head-to-Head (career)

[Josh Smith](#) vs. Suns: 17.1 PPG 8.3 RPG 2.4 APG 2.0 BPG 47.1 FG% (16 games)

[Michael Beasley](#) vs. Hawks: 17.9 PPG 6.7 RPG 1.4 APG 51.1 FG% (9 games)

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Smith scores the third most points on a per game basis against the Suns, small sample compared to conference rivals, but he feasts against the purple and orange. That is not shocking as the four position for the Suns has not been the same since the departure of [Amare Stoudemire](#)

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There is Good Beasley and there is Bad Beasley, against the Hawks, it is more Good Beasley. He averages the third most points against the dirty red birds, which is a positive sign for a potential offensive burst from the enigmatic talent.

Starting Line-Ups

PG - [Goran Dragic](#) v. [Jeff Teague](#)

SG - [Jared Dudley](#) v. [Devin Harris](#)

SF - [P.J. Tucker](#) v. [Kyle Korver](#)

PF - [Luis Scola](#) v. [Josh Smith](#)

C - [Marcin Gortat](#) v. [Al Horford](#)

Potential Suns Inactives: [Hamed Haddadi](#) & [Diante Garrett](#)

Potential Hawks Inactives: [Lou Williams](#)

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Key Match-Up

[Goran Dragic](#) vs. [Jeff Teague](#)

They are both young point guards that have gotten better over their time in the NBA, Dragic in his fifth year and Teague in his fourth.

The Hawks have slowly handed the keys to the offense over to Teague as he has been given more responsibility every year. This season he has broken out as one of the teams best, and most valuable players every night. Dragic was brought in to be the best player on the Suns and he has been that. Each is very young and still developing. From a pure athletic standpoint this will be a fun match-up to watch.

Interesting Stat: 0-7

Under interim head coach [Lindsey Hunter](#) the Suns are winless when they have one day of rest or practice between games. On back-to-backs or any other situation the team is 7-4. Tonight's game is on one day rest.

Meaningless Stat: +/-

On the season only [Shannon Brown](#) (+1.2), Jermaine O'Neal (+1.6), and Gortat (+1.2) have a positive plus minus verses their opponents. Every other player on the roster is either even (Dudley) or a negative (11 others) this season. There is that.